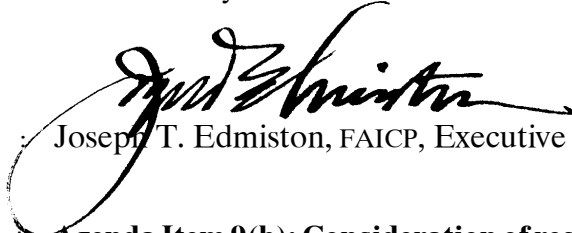


Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: August 30, 2004

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 9(b): Consideration of resolution confirming the August 11, 2004 comment letter to the United States Forest Service regarding National Forest Land Management Plans and Draft Environmental Impact Statement.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution confirming the August 11, 2004 comment letter to the United States Forest Service regarding National Forest Land Management Plans and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Legislative Authority: Sections 33211(c) and 33204.3 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The comment period for the above-mentioned documents ended on August 11, 2004. Although several organizations, and Conservancy staff, requested an extension of the comment period, the comment period was not extended. Staff submitted the attached letter to the USDA Forest Service. The extensive documents, the Angeles National Forest Management Plan and DEIS, can be accessed on the web at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/>. Staff has provided a short summary below of some key points from these documents.

The Forest Service mission is: "To sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's Forests and Grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

There are six alternatives presented in the DEIS. The DEIS documents the effects of applying alternative ways of managing the four southern California forests, Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forests. To summarize the alternatives, Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative, which means that current activities in the current management plans would generally continue, to provide a mix of recreational opportunities and commodities while maintaining biological diversity and ecological diversity. The theme of Alternative 2 is maintaining biological diversity and ecological integrity while providing a gradual increase in recreation opportunities. (The preferred alternative for the Cleveland National Forest in the DEIS is Alternative 2.) Alternative 3 would result in an increased emphasis on maintaining and protecting biological diversity and ecological integrity and maximizing special area designations (e.g., wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, research natural areas). Recreation and other uses of the forests are continued but at a lower level, with increased controls.

The primary theme of Alternative 4 is an increased emphasis on recreation with intensive levels of management controls, and focused emphasis on offsetting effects to the biological diversity and ecological integrity of the forests. (The preferred alternative for the Angeles, Los Padres, and San Bernardino national forests in the DEIS is Alternative 4.) The primary theme of Alternative 5 is an increased emphasis on land use zones compatible with forest resources development. Alternative 6 was developed in response to public comments recommending increased protection of all forest resources. The primary theme of Alternative 6 is a strong emphasis on the protection and restoration of biological diversity and ecological function, and mitigation of existing impacts from all uses on National Forest System land.

To summarize some of the impacts of the alternatives, Alternative 6 would create the least threat to species-at-risk. The threats that would occur under Alternative 3 are less than what would occur under Alternative 1, 2, 4, and 5, but higher than in Alternative 6. Alternatives 3 and 6 have the least potential for the spread of invasive non-natives.

Alternative 5 focuses primarily on accommodating the increased demand for motorized uses. Some motorized and developed recreation opportunities would be lost or forgone in Alternatives 3 and 6 if road systems are reduced and/or if campgrounds and picnic areas are closed to reduce resource impacts.

Alternatives 3 and 6 will develop a maximum use of conservation education and partnerships. Alternatives 3 and 6 will focus land acquisition for habitat linkages.

All grazing areas were determined to be suitable in alternatives 1 through 5, although the number of suitable grazing acres varies by alternative. Alternative 3 would result in a substantially smaller number of vacant grazing acres expected to be available for grazing than for alternatives 1, 2, 4, and 5. Alternative 6 recommends closure of all vacant grazing areas.

With respect to fuels and vegetation management, Alternative 6 treats fewer acres through mortality treatments and fuelbreak maintenance and construction, and it treats more acres than alternatives 1 through 5 in buffers, tree thinning and prescribed fire projects.

For the Angeles National Forest (and for the four forests overall), Alternative 6 would result in the greatest number of acres recommended for wilderness; Alternative 3 would result in the second greatest. Substantially fewer acres are recommended for wilderness in Alternative 2, substantially fewer in Alternative 4, and no areas are recommended for wilderness in alternatives 1 and 5.